



Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association

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George Motel

Testimony before the Environment Committee

In Opposition to HB 6618 AAC THE THRESHOLD FOR LABELING WINE AS "CONNECTICUT-GROWN"

Good afternoon Representative Albis and Senator Kennedy and members of the Environment Committee, my name is George Motel, and my wife and I are the owners of Sunset Meadow Vineyards in Goshen, CT. We started our vineyard about twenty years ago by purchasing a non producing farm. We began to plant vines and for the first two years of operation we sold fruit to other CT Vineyards. Today we have over 35 acres of vines planted and produce about 5,500 cases per year. I am here in my capacity as the President of the CT Vineyard and Winery Association (CVWA) and I am also a member of the Farm Winery Development Council, whose purpose is to foster and promote agriculture, specifically grape growing. I would like to raise concern and opposition to HB 6618 AAC the Threshold For Labeling Wine as CT Grown.

This legislation seeks to lower the percentage of grapes needed to label wine as CT Grown to only 25%. Currently the threshold is 100%. We feel that there may be some confusion with other percentages that are in statute and the CT Grown Law. Presently CT Vineyards need 25% of their own fruit (grown on premises) to qualify for a Farm Winery license with Liquor Control. The other 75% of fruit can be bought from other growers across the nation. This percentage is set low to help vineyards battle the erratic weather conditions, blight or other anomalies that make agricultural businesses difficult to manage. It is the hope however, that each winery grows more than 25% of the grapes that go into the wine. This is very different than the classification of a CT grown product. I feel that this bill is contrary to the mission of the Farm Winery Development Council and ignores the efforts of true growers in the State.

CT grown products must be made entirely of CT fruit. If they are not, we feel it is a misrepresentation to the consumer and could create conflict with the Federal labeling requirements under TTB (Alcohol, Tax and Trade Bureau). TTB has strict rules governing what can be placed on a label, and we feel this would be in violation.

Growing vines and developing vineyards is a very capital intensive and labor intensive process. Recognizing 25% as CT grown is an insult to the true farmers and a short cut to those who have not invested the time and money into their operations. It will be misleading to consumers and compromise the integrity of the farm winery industry. CT Vineyards have special privileges because our businesses are rooted in the land. We are stewards of that land for the State and consumers. We work extremely hard to ensure the consumer knows exactly what is in our product. If the product

is not 100% CT Grown we do not feel it should be labeled as such. It would be a disservice to the consumer. We respectfully ask you to vote against this bill.